

Eudaimonia, Talents, and Finance

By Joshua D. Glawson

“These virtues are formed in man by his doing the actions ... The good of man is a working of the soul in the way of excellence in a complete life.” -Aristotle

In the study of Ancient Greek philosophy and Stoicism, we cover the idea of *eudaimonia* which translates as *happiness* or *human flourishing*. The etymology of *eudaimonia* is derived from the word *eû* which means *good* or *well*, and the second word *daímōn* which means *dispenser*, *genius*, or *to divide*. *Eudaimonia* is the concept of genuine human happiness, and ultimately *human flourishing*, arising from the balance of three key points:

- **Taking personal responsibility**
- **Focusing on what one can control**
- **Living a virtuous, purposeful, life with intentional action**

By living in accordance with these principles, many philosophers believe that people are able to achieve happiness. When these personal virtues are acquired and coordinated with other people who share these virtues, as a form of division of labor, this creates an environment for human flourishing. [Eudaimonism](#), in short, is an ethical doctrine holding that the value of moral action lies in its capacity to produce happiness. It is an ancient, philosophical, form of personal development that people can still benefit from today.

While pursuing a path of personal development, people find that their individual talents are able to help them excel in life and find a sense of fulfillment or happiness. For many cultures, someone's *talent* is viewed as a *virtue* related to *genius* in a particular field. While for the ancient Greeks and Stoics, someone's genius *talent* was only *virtuous* when directed in purposeful action toward improved happiness and flourishing. Not living up to one's values or utilizing their recognizable talents tends to lead to living an unhappy, unproductive, unfulfilled, and unprosperous life.

In fact, the modern word [*talent*](#) derives from a combination of *talanton*, which is Greek for *balance*, *sum*, or *weight*, and the word [*daímōn*](#), as found in *eudaimonia*. It gives us the idea that one's virtuous talents increase their subjective value among other people. The Latin word [*talentum*](#) meant *weight* or *sum of money*, giving us the archaic definition of *talent* which meant money. This is the origin of the phrase that someone is *worth their weight in gold*. It is also likely to be the source for the idea that the accumulation of money is a measure of value, although many other philosophers and economists have demonstrated equating money with value to be an improper application of concepts.

We can see the concept of talents reflected in the Bible in [Matthew 25:14-30](#), there is the "Parable of the Talents." In this story, Jesus describes three stewards with each receiving from their master [*talents*](#) (large sums of money, i.e. coins): the first receiving 5, the second receiving 2, and the third receiving 1. The master then leaves for a long journey. Upon his return, he asks the servants to return his talents. The first and second servants doubled their coins by investing. The third servant

lived in fear and buried his coin, and when the master asked for his coin the servant was only able to produce the original piece. The master condemned the third servant while praising the others.

For many years I wondered why this master condemned the third servant. It was only after understanding the philosophy behind it that I understood the message. People are not naturally inactive beings, we are unique creatures in the world. People are active beings with active minds, we take concepts and build upon them, and we use the world around us to make it better for ourselves and others. To live outside of this, and to not be good stewards of what we have, is to fail to live up to our natural being and a failure to live up to our highest values. The third steward did not live up to the highest values and practices of his master by investing, instead he acted out of fear and inactivity. He did not take personal responsibility, he did not focus on what he can control instead of what he could not, and he did not act virtuously or purposefully.

We must ask ourselves if we are living according to our nature of being active, living up to our values, and being good stewards of our talents- whether that is money or the modern understanding of talents. Are we fulfilling our greatest human potential and personal potential?

Don't let your money become inactive, just sitting in an account without accumulating. One's money and finances are to reflect their values of human nature, personal values, and the subjective value created. We do this by taking personal responsibility, focusing on what we can personally control, and living a

virtuous, purposeful, life filled with intentional action. This is a part of what it takes to reach personal and societal *eudaimonia*.